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ABSTRACT

In recent years, institutions of higher education have come under increasing pressure to integrate the formal teaching of ethics in their already unwieldy curricula. Evaluating a department's success in providing students with an appropriate introduction to ethical issues is important. Feedback about institutional effectiveness can help instructors work to improve their practices. Reviewing student portfolios consumes enormous time and energy, and in some educational contexts, it may be desirable to develop alternative assessment mechanisms which are more efficient. When departments are expected to track outcomes for large numbers of majors, for instance, it may be useful to have a standardized tool which can be administered en masse. Such instruments would be used to measure program effectiveness, rather than individual student outcomes. This paper presents such a survey instrument, for use with graduating psychology majors, which provides an index of whether students recognize the provision of coverage of various content related to ethics. (Contains 10 references.) (GCP)

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Assessing the Teaching of Ethics in Psychology: A Sample Survey Instrument

by
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Assessing the Teaching of Ethics In Psychology:

A Sample Survey Instrument

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In recent years, institutions of higher education have come under increasing pressure to integrate the formal teaching of ethics in their already unwieldy curricula. Exhortations from respected critics and commentators (Lisman, 1996; Schwarz, 2000) have provided some of the motivation, concerns about accreditation and obligations associated with grants also figure into the equation. The discipline of psychology has been keenly sensitive to ethical issues for some time, and its members have invested substantial time in developing and refining The Ethical Standards of Psychologists. Psychology has been in the forefront in delineating ethical principles and standards of conduct for several the past several decades (Solso & MacLin, 2002; Balogh, 2002). Licensure in many states virtually requires memorization of these standards, and in most states professionals are expected to attend annual continuing education programs emphasizing ethics in order to remain credentialed. Given the centrality of these concerns in their

professional work, it stands to reason that instructors of psychology courses would make orienting students to the ethical dimensions of research and practice an ongoing priority.

Evaluating a department's success in providing students with an appropriate introduction to these issues is important. Feedback about institutional effectiveness can help instructors work to improve their practices. Teaching ethics often presents a greater challenge than is commonly recognized. "An intellectualized, point-and-tell approach fails to produce lasting change in awareness and understanding of ethical issues" (Balogh, 2002). Some texts used in experimental design and counseling courses offer extremely thoughtful examinations of tough ethical issues, and emphasize the centrality of these ideas in the profession (Solso & MacLin, 2002; Martin, 2000; Gibson & Mitchell, 1999). Many experienced teachers suggest that instructors wishing to improve their teaching in this area employ strategies including the case study technique, media journals, role playing, debates, and supervised field experiences (Balogh, 2002). These techniques offer students opportunities to become far more deeply engaged with the key issues, to connect emotionally with these concerns, and to practice the process of deliberation invited by various ethically challenging situations. Considering ethical issues in realistic contexts provides far more generalizable lessons (Fisch, 1997). This should facilitate translation of

learning into actual practice as the student confronts ethical dilemmas in their own lives.

According to Balogh (2002), the assessment of the development of ethical sensitivity is extremely difficult. Providing students with opportunities to reflect on difficult issues, and offering feedback on their approach to these quandaries, can help make them more attuned to relevant issues and more systematic in their analysis. Balogh suggests that self assessment of the quality of this education experience may be more appropriate than using a graded format. One option is for instructors to review students' portfolios of written assignments, in order to assure their participation in the process of meaningful reflection. This integrates the evaluation and teaching process, and helps deepen the instructors' sensitivity to the developmental level and capacity for moral reasoning that characterizes particular students. This understanding can help instructors to present material in a manner which is more likely to match students' competencies.

However, it may still be quite valuable for departments interested in enhancing their effectiveness in this endeavor to administer more standardized, objective measures. Reviewing student portfolios consumes enormous time and energy, and in some educational contexts it may be desirable to develop alternative assessment mechanisms which are more efficient. When departments are expected to track outcomes for large numbers of majors, for instance, it may be useful to

have a standardized tool which can be administered en masse. Such instruments would be used to measure program effectiveness, rather than individual student outcomes. Repaeated administration of this instrument, using a pretest-posttest approach, could allow departments to evaluate the utility of various different interventions designed to enhance program effectiveness.

In order to develop such a measure, several texts that include discussion of ethical issues within the discipline (e.g., Kimmel,1996; Koocher & Keith-Spiegel, 1998; Martin, 2000; Gibson & Mitchell, 1999; Solso & MacLin, 2002; Chambliss, 2000) were reviewed by a panel of raters with experience in teaching undergraduate psychology courses. From these sources, a preliminary list of learning objectives was derived. Additional learning objectives were developed through a focus group discussion among current psychology instructors. The relative importance of each standard of practice or principle was evaluated by having raters assign each a value, using a 10-point Likert-format scale. Since the brevity of the instrument was of concern, the initial pool of issues was winnowed down to a set of fifteen principles or practices that were deemed most crucial for undergraduates to understand and embrace. Survey items assessing the effectiveness of the institution in exposing students to each of these matters were written, piloted, revised, and readinistered, in order to enhance the clarity of the items.

The resulting survey instrument appears below. It was administered to graduating psychology majors. Results proved useful to the target psychology department in delineating areas for improvement and in clarifying the elements of their program that were perceived as effectively addressing students' needs. Other academic departments have adapted the instrument to suit their own individual requirements.

This measure provides an index of whether students recognize the provision of coverage of various content related to ethics. Measuring students' perceptions of the adequacy of their training is admittedly an imperfect way of gauging the success of this instruction in transforming student attitudes and approaches. It does not provide a measure of actual student behavior in ethically problematic contexts. However, it does permit an evaluation of at least the minimally required initial step in the educational process, namely whether or not students have been encouraged to develop some rudimentary familiarity with the relevant issues and concepts. In addition, the act of completing this survey itself provides an indirect didactic opportunity for students. Since the items articulate key standards of conduct, in evaluating whether their educational program provided appropriate examination of these points, students are simultaneously learning the importance of these practices.

Future planned work will use this tool to examine the impact of several strategies for improving the delivery of information related to

ethics within the discipline. A validity study is planned to assess whether scores on this instrument predict actual levels of sophistication in responding to sample ethical dilemmas.

Ursinus College Ethical Standards Survey

We are interested in assessing whether your experiences at Ursinus College have affected your attitudes about the importance of ethical conduct in scholarship and research. Please fill in the circle under the appropriate response for each of the following issues. Your responses will be kept in strictest confidence, and your participation in this process is entirely voluntary. The response options for the first section are: **never discussed, addressed or examined; insufficiently examined; briefly but sufficiently examined; and strongly emphasized.**

	Never	Insufficiently Examined	Briefly But Sufficiently	Strongly Emphasized
• Findings should be presented via referred channels before seeking publicity	O	O	O	O
• Plagiarism is unacceptable	O	O	O	O
• Citations must be accurate	O	O	O	O
• Articles should be submitted for publication one at a time	O	O	O	O
• The order of authors should reflect their relative contribution to a project	O	O	O	O
• Falsifying credentials is unacceptable	O	O	O	O
• It is wrong to fish for statistical significance	O	O	O	O
• Practices for determining statistical significance must be carefully followed	O	O	O	O
• Use of human subjects in research requires committee review	O	O	O	O
• Informed consent must be obtained from adult participants	O	O	O	O
• Parental consent must be obtained for minors	O	O	O	O
• Federal guidelines must be followed when using animals in research	O	O	O	O
• Confidentiality must be strictly maintained	O	O	O	O
• Findings must be reported honestly	O	O	O	O
• Do unto others as you would have them do unto you (Matthew 7:12)	O	O	O	O

Circle the appropriate response

A. Has Ursinus College made you more aware of these ethical issues?	**Not At All**	**Somewhat**	**Extremely**	
1. How important do you believe it is for scholars/researchers to adhere to ethical guidelines?	**Extremely Unimportant**	**Somewhat Unimportant**	**Somewhat Important**	**Extremely Important**
2. Do you personally adhere to these guidelines?	**Never**	**Sometimes**	**Often**	**Always**
3. Do you feel that your experiences at Ursinus College have made you more likely to work within these ethical guidelines?	**Not At All**	**Somewhat**	**Extremely**	
If no, is this because you already adhered to these guidelines when you came to Ursinus College?		**Yes**	**No**	

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